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TENNESSEE WILLIAMS – A STREETCAR NAMED  
DESIRE:  
KONTROVERZNÍ TÉMATA A CENZURA VE FILMOVÉ  
ADAPTACI DIVADELNÍ HRY  
CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES AND CENSORSHIP IN THE  
FILM ADAPTATION OF THE STAGE PLAY

**Bakalářská práce:** 12-FP-KAJ- 022

**Autor:**  
Barbora BERÁNKOVÁ

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Jméno a příjmení: **Barbora BERÁNKOVÁ**  
Osobní číslo: **P09000207**  
Studijní program: **B7507 Specializace v pedagogice**  
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Vedoucí bakalářské práce:

**Mgr. Zénó Vernyik**  
Katedra anglického jazyka

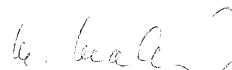
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doc. RNDr. Miroslav Brzezina, CSc.  
děkan

L.S.



PhDr. Marcela Malá, M.A., Ph.D.  
vedoucí katedry

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## Čestné prohlášení

**Název práce:** Tennessee Williams – A Streetcar Named Desire. Kontroverzní témata a cenzura ve filmové adaptaci divadelní hry.

**Jméno a příjmení autora:** Barbora Beránková

**Osobní číslo:** P09000207

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**Anotace:**

Tato práce je zaměřena na boj mezi instinkty a super-egem odehrávající se v příběhu divadelní hry *A Streetcar Named Desire* od Tennesseeho Williamse i na jeho analogii v cenzuře filmové adaptace této divadelní hry. Cílem je představit pravidla takzvaného Produkčního kódu uplatňovaného ve filmovém průmyslu v USA, který byl sepsán roku 1930 na základě konzervativních postojů té doby a který ovlivňoval produkci filmů až do roku 1968. V důsledku cenzury založené na tomto dokumentu, ve filmové adaptaci *A Streetcar Named Desire* došlo k závažným zásahům týkajícím se sexuality, násilí a otázky genderových rolí. Tyto změny zásadně zasáhly do děje a charakteristiky postav, což změnilo i původní výklad této hry.

**Klíčová slova:** *A Streetcar Named Desire*, sex, homosexualita, agrese, cenzura, genderové role, filmová adaptace

**Annotation:**

This thesis focuses on a struggle between instincts and the super-ego taking place directly in the story of the original play *A Streetcar Named Desire* by Tennessee Williams and, further, on its analogy in censorship of the film adaptation of this stage play. The aim is to introduce certain restrictions stated in the Production Code, which applied to the film industry of the USA. It was written in 1930 and influenced the film production until 1968. Naturally, it reflected extremely conservative tendencies of that time. As a consequence of the censorship based on this document, many serious interventions in the script of *A Streetcar Named Desire* regarding sexuality, violence and the issue of gender roles were made. These changes significantly affected the plot and characterization, which led to the alteration of the original meaning of the play.

**Key words:** *A Streetcar Named Desire*, sex, homosexuality, aggression, censorship, gender roles, film adaptation

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## Introduction

When a film adaptation is made, many issues have to be taken into consideration. To transform a written story into a film, certain changes need to be made so that the narrative can be brought to screen. Since film is a different medium, this transposition can be understood as a process of translating a text into another language, and this requires more than just changing the form of a narrative. While there are various ways of adapting a piece of writing to a motion picture, yet no film adaptation ever becomes a completely true copy of the original text. For instance, a literary narrative has to be rewritten into a script, and it is also quite common that some scenes have to be left out because of the limited footage. There are also obviously certain dissimilarities between a stage play and a literary narrative, such as a novel, in this respect.

Yet, technical and formal aspects are naturally not the only problem that filmmakers have to deal with. In fact, there is a possibility to make even more significant changes by intervening in the original script. As a result, the alteration of the very plot can lead to a different interpretation of the whole work of art.

These changes are not always only caused by the filmmakers' free will, but often also by various restrictions coming from authorities, and these can originate serious modifications in the message of the narrative. Society and the conventions that rule it have influenced film art enormously. Especially the first half of the twentieth century is known to be a time when many areas of human life were taboo. Such a conservative world view often made it difficult to speak openly and without prejudices about ways of life deemed in some way unconventional. In Hollywood, this attitude towards depicting inconvenient issues became official in the 1930s by the adoption of the so-called Production Code, which had an impact on cinematography until the late 1960s.

*A Streetcar Named Desire* was brought to screen in 1951. The original stage play



by Tennessee Williams, introduced in 1947, is a complex psychological drama dealing with such controversial issues as homosexuality, promiscuity and violence. Even though it is considered as one of the first films to efficiently bypass some of the prescriptions of the Production Code, the plot of the film adaptation of *A Streetcar Named Desire* is significantly different from the original stage play. This thesis deals primarily with the issues and original structure of this work, and the effects of their censorship on the characters in the story.

The first part of this paper is centered on the struggle between the individual and society manifested in the inner fight of basic instincts against the super-ego of the main female character, Blanche DuBois. Her story illustrates how the cruelty of society can lead to a collapse of the ego and the total breakdown of personality. The analysis of Blanche's character serves to demonstrate the complexity of the plot that the most challenging and complex topics presented in it are of crucial importance, since it is the deep and realistic characterization that creates the very essence of the play.

The second part of this thesis provides an analysis of the changes to the plot of *Streetcar* demanded by the supporters of the Production Code. Considering the meaning of the original play, it is somewhat paradoxical that the very same issues that were the reason of Blanche's mental problems in the play, became the real subject of the conflict between an individual (Tennessee Williams) and the conventions of society, as represented by the Production Code. For the censors, certain topics were too controversial, too improper, too obscene. Homosexuality is probably the best known and simultaneously the most problematic feature of Williams' plays. Nevertheless, that was not the only obstacle. Sex, violence and unconventional gender characteristics pervaded the whole work in an unacceptable manner.

Yet, these alterations insult the spectators by treating them as children. The omission of homosexuality, rape, the elimination of women's sexual desire, of all

references to sex and the insistence on the punishment of violence made the plot confusing and very unrealistic.

The aim of this thesis is to demonstrate that the plot of the original stage play *A Streetcar Named Desire* by Tennessee Williams is based on the struggle between the basic instincts and the super-ego, which was in the film adaptation from 1951 blurred by the deletion of Allan Grey's homosexuality, Blanche's promiscuity and by unrealistic characterization through a process mirroring that of Blanche's inner struggle.

## **1. Controversial Issues: A Struggle between Instincts and the Super-ego**

Many critics are convinced that the plot of *Streetcar* is based primarily on the social distinction between Blanche and Stanley, who represent two different “archetypes of cultures or species” (Bak 2004, 4). However, in my opinion, they are two unique and complex individuals, not only flat archetypes. Therefore, to understand the meaning of the events, one needs to take even the mental processes of the characters’ minds into account. In the case of *Streetcar*, the conscious and unconscious contents of the human mind are the major determiners of the characters’ actions and the nature of relationships among them. Therefore, I will consider the play mainly as psychological drama.

In fact, it is Blanche’s personal traumas and desires what creates the syuzhet of *Streetcar*. Each scene gets its meaning from what she experiences. Furthermore, these personal conscious and unconscious mental processes have their roots in the deepest layer of the human mind, the collective unconscious. From this perspective, I characterize the plot as a struggle between the basic instincts and the super-ego. This latter one functions basically as a kind of personal censor, and thus it has an impact on the state of the ego. This is why the super-ego is always indirectly represented in the ego; in this case that of Blanche. This struggle between the individual and society is recognizable directly in the plot in the form of controversial issues which cause a conflict that affects the conscious mind enormously because “images, language and ideas are [...] of crucial importance in the development of individual beings and all are manifestations of the link between human individuals and the social context in which they live” (Dant 2003, 88).

### **1.1. Illusion vs. Reality**

This conflict began with Blanche's discovery of her husband's homosexuality. When she discovered it, she expressed how displeased and disgusted she was. We can observe the first sign of the super-ego taking over Blanche's action right here. Since this part of the personality contains practically those patterns of behaviour which society considers acceptable, the relatively illiberal way of life, which was dominant during the last century, led to anxiety caused by unconventional tendencies, especially those regarding sexuality. As a result, Blanche refused to understand the reality of the situation and condemned Allan, her husband. At this point, however, those are Allan's sexual drives that Blanche encountered, not yet her own instincts. After the instinctual part of Allan Grey's mind was confronted with society in the form of the merciless judgement expressed by his own wife, he could not bear the shame and committed suicide. He could not find a balance between the super-ego and his basic drives and that led to frustration. The reason for the revelation of his homosexuality resulting in his suicide is the collapse of his ego.

This was the crucial moment that caused Blanche's breakdown and that is simultaneously the beginning of her own inner fight. Consequently, this hurtful memory is being transformed into the contents of Blanche's personal unconscious, that is to say, the part of the unconscious psyche which has its origin in personal experience. These contents were once conscious but later have been forgotten or repressed because of the influence of the super-ego (Jung 1981, 42). The horror of the death of a person who was so close to her is multiplied by her feeling of responsibility for what happened to him. Blanche's consciousness fails to deal with the guilt and so the unconscious defence mechanisms must take care of the unmanageable frustrating memory. She cannot stand the reality about herself because the thought of being responsible for murder, even if not directly, is unacceptable by

principle. However, the trauma echoes in other ways, as well.

As a consequence of the struggle with the reality of her own life, Blanche's ego is very unstable. Even though those mental contents that she thinks she thought she had to get rid of may have been removed to her personal unconscious, they could become conscious again. She is too scared to reveal the truth about herself. Therefore, she wears an imaginary mask which allows her to feel like a decent member of society. She desperately tries to protect this image. This fact is manifested in several scenes where Blanche is anxiously careful about how she looks and what other people think about her. For example, she does not want the lights to shine on her face. That is obvious when she says: "Now, then, let me look at you. But don't you look at me, Stella, no, no, no, not till later, not till I've bathed and rested! And turn that over-light off! Turn that off! I won't be looked at in this merciless glare!" (Williams 1951, 18-19). The "merciless glare" symbolizes the potential act of judgement and condemnation. However, just a few minutes later, she tries to convince her sister and herself that she is still worth looking at. She says: "I want you to look at *my* figure! You know I haven't put on one ounce in ten years, Stella? I weigh what I weighed the summer you left Belle Reve. The summer Dad died and you left us" (22). Under the influence of remorse, she needs to justify herself in the eyes of other people. Amongst others, one way to do so is to point out someone else's mistakes. The mention of Stella leaving her is obviously offensive. At this moment, we learn about another misery Blanche went through which is the loss of Belle Reve. When Stella asks what happened, Blanche responds somewhat inadequately: "You're a fine one to ask me how it went!" And furthermore: "You're a fine one to sit there *accusing me* of it!" (26). As she defends herself and attacks Stella, her neurosis becomes evident more and more.

Blanche is so uncertain about her conscious "self", that she begins to identify

her fate with a fictitious one. She tries to act as a confident woman who is satisfied with herself, which is implied when she speaks to Stanley: “All right; now, Mr. Kowalski, let us proceed without any more double-talk. I’m ready to answer all questions. I’ve nothing to hide. What is it?” (40). Since her ego, “the centre of the field of consciousness” (Jung 1959, 3), did not manage to achieve the balance, she creates an illusion because she thinks that that is the way to make other people and even herself love herself. When Mitch naively claims: “I like you to be exactly the way that you are, because in all my-experience-I have never known anyone like you.” (Williams 1951, 87), he responds only to what Blanche is willing to reveal. However, she is afraid of expressing her actual personality and her needs. Despite her illusive need to avoid reality, Blanche instinctively “wants to be loved for who she is” (Cahir 1994, 74).

Her identity is unsteady and she “conjures persona after persona, as she constructs character after character” (Cahir 1994, 73). After a fight with Mitch, Blanche talks to Stanley and presents herself as “a cultivated woman, a woman of intelligence and breeding” (Williams 1951, 126) while she speaks of a rich gentleman who reportedly wants only her “companionship” (126). Later, she makes up stories about Mitch’s earlier behaviour: “He returned with a box of roses to beg my forgiveness!” (126). However, this neurotic repression of the personal experience prevents the individuation process of the heroine, which would in the ideal case lead to “the integration of the contents of the collective unconscious” (Jung 1959, 23). Therefore, the acknowledgement of reality is what Blanche actually needs and desires. The fact is that “one of Blanches many illusions is that she claims to want *only* illusion” (Cahir 1994, 74).

Furthermore, there is a famous symbol of Blanche’s fear of people looking at her – the paper lantern. While talking to Mitch, she asks him: “I bought this adorable

little colored paper lantern at a Chinese shop on Bourbon. Put it over the light bulb! Will you, please?" (55). Later on, he realizes that Blanche is not completely honest with him and the metaphor of her "avoidance of reality" (Cahir 1994, 76) appears again: "What it means is I've never had a real good look at you, Blanche. Let's turn the light on here." (Williams 1951, 116). After Mitch puts the paper lantern off the light and explains that he wants to be just realistic, Blanche says: "I don't want realism. I want magic! Yes, yes, magic! I try to give that to people. I misrepresent things to them. I don't tell truth, I tell what *ought* to be truth. And if that is sinful, then let me be damned for it!" (117). By that, she confirms her unstable mental state and her inability not only to hear the truth but also to tell it herself. And Blanche indeed is going to be "damned". However, she would be probably punished by the society rather for the illusion she creates, which she thinks is the right thing to do, than for the death of her husband, which she feels responsible for.

All in all, the development of Blanche's mental state resulting from her inner fight noticeably resembles certain features of what her husband went through. Under the pressure of society and its conventions, he was unable to come out with his secret because of the fear of being rejected. So is Blanche. Consequently, she chooses to live in a lie and to pretend living happily in accordance with the common way of life of a higher social class. That could be analogic to Allan's decision to marry a woman even though he was a homosexual. Further, both Blanche and Allan are exposed to the cruelty of people around them and, finally, they both end up broken and unable to deal with their past. Although they refuse to face reality, the basic thing they really want is to be accepted by others without pretending to be someone else.

## **1.2. Sexual Desire and Aggression**

### **1.2.1. The Drive towards Death**

In association with these two kinds of human emotions, sexual desire and

aggressive behaviour, one may think of the two basic Freudian drives – Eros and the death drive. They can be used to describe another effect of the struggle between instincts and the super-ego on the characters of *Streetcar*. Through these terms, Freud introduces his theory according to which an individual during her or his sexual development seeks for pleasure and tries to avoid unpleasure, whereas sexual desire is, despite the excitation, a source of unpleasurable feelings, and then, “the pleasure of orgasm is enhanced by the removal of that unpleasurable tension” (Dant 2003, 89). Nevertheless, this “pleasure principle” has to be controlled by the “reality principle”, which enables to postpone satisfaction and temporarily bear the unpleasure (90). The reality principle is the result of the social and cultural environment and it basically makes it possible for an individual to live in society. However, according to Freud's theory, “there are tendencies operating in the self that lie behind the pleasure principle” (90). One of those “instinctual forces that work alongside the libido that shape the way ego is formed” (90) is “the desire for repetition”. In that case, instincts “tend towards the restoration of an earlier state of things” (Freud 1959, 32) and then “the phenomena of organic development must be attributed external, disturbing and diverting influences” (32). The desire for repetition applies not only to the sexual desire and that is why it lies “beyond the pleasure principle”. In other words, there would be no progress without culture because our instincts tell us move back, towards the past, not forward. That of course means that we tend to return to the “time when there was no external influence” (Dant 2003, 90). Therefore, whereas the sex drive is oriented towards life, this instinct is a drive towards death. That “makes life a journey in which this tension is played out with first one group dominating and then the other” (91).

Throughout *Streetcar*, one can observe Blanche's anxious fear of death. She is afraid of getting old, which is also manifested in those scenes where she is careful



about her appearance. She struggles with the image of the woman other people seem to like so that she still can feel attractive and wanted. She confesses to Stella: „It isn't enough to be soft. You've got to be soft *and attractive*. And I – I'm fading now! I don't know how much longer I can turn the trick“ (Williams 1951, 79). Supposing that the sexual desire is the drive towards life, men's attention may mean getting farther from death to her. Blanche seeks for the satisfaction and compensation of what she went through in sexual life. She needs to feel closeness and love. She “is looking for redemption, for forgiveness, in the arms of boys–young like her husband–and in her confession to Mitch. She wants Mitch to absolve, forgive, release her from the great cruelty of her past” (Cahir 1994, 74).

Although there is a promise of a certain progress, of a new life, she uses sex to compensate her loss without taking her position, reputation or the necessity of leaving the past into consideration. Blanche desires to live and, paradoxically, her way of satisfaction of the desire leads her “towards the restoration of an earlier state of things” (Freud 1959, 32), towards the death of her husband and, consequently, her own final breakdown. Her fate is foreshadowed in the very beginning, when Blanche arrives to New Orleans and, confused and horrified by the place, she says: “They told me to take a street-car named Desire, and then transfer to one called Cemeteries and ride six blocks and get off at–Elysian Fields!” (Williams 1951, 15). She expected quite a different kind of destination. As Freud says, “the hypothesis of self-preservative instincts, such as we attribute to all living beings, stands in marked opposition to the idea that instinctual life as a whole serves to bring about death” (Freud 1959, 33). That is why these two forces, the desire for repetition and the external influence supporting the development, must function as “component instincts” (33), which does not seem to happen in Blanche's case. This is another example of her ego not being able to reach the balance. As a result, it is a problem for

the organism to “follow its own path to death” (33).

### **1.2.2. Sexual Desire vs. Romantic Love**

Blanche DuBois' super-ego is a reflection of the conservative southern society that she comes from, which makes it difficult for her to admit that she is a human being driven by some basic instincts and simultaneously please the society, whose cruel conventions she was taught to obey. On the other hand, she is forced by the circumstances to live the promiscuous life that caused her the mental issues she is facing, while she does not take the rules of the society into account. Consequently, there is a tension between the super-ego and her instincts, which leads to her denying of the real nature of her lifestyle and position in society. She has been rejected, she has lost her job as a teacher and yet, she still tries to act as if nothing of those things happened. Although she obviously does not seek for purely animal sexual satisfaction, she is ashamed because a decent woman is not expected to behave in such a manner. “For sexuality, which supposedly unites the couple, disrupts the kingdom if uncontrolled; it, too, must be contained and organized. Woman becomes, in her nineteenth-century designation, 'the sex'. Hers is the sphere of reproduction” (Mitchell 1974, 405). By contrast, Freud “leaves behind a traditional perspective of sexuality as biological predetermination to be heterosexual, reproductive in the aim and an animal impulse. Instead, he suggests that sexuality is shaped by, and manifested in, the higher human faculties of consciousness and mind” (Dant 2003, 88). Even though sexuality is a natural part of human life, Blanche is a victim of the judgemental society. According to Freud, “libido is a form of psychic energy that is distinct from the need for food and from other mental processes. The force of the libido is within the person and exists somewhere between the mind and the body” (89). Nevertheless, the traditional view of sexuality is quite narrow in what role

libido plays in human life and the claim about it being an animal impulse which is reproductive in the aim describes “the place of all women in patriarchal culture” (Mitchell 1974, 405).

Consequently, there are many metaphors throughout *Streetcar* which indicate Blanche trying to justify and purify herself. For example, there are several scenes where she is talking about how much she needs to take a bath. One time, when she is finished, Stanley is waiting for her and she tells him: “Hello, Stanley! Here I am, all freshly bathed and scented, and feeling like a brand new human being!” (Williams 1951, 37). That evokes the symbolic act of washing the sins away. Further, when Blanche is introducing herself to Mitch, she explains the meaning of her name: “It’s a French name. It means woods and Blanche means white, so the two together mean white woods. Like an orchard in spring! You can remember it by that” (54-55). Blanche’s conversation with Stanley when she asks him about what astrological sign he was born under has a similar reference. The very next moment, she explains that she was born under Virgo and remarks: “Virgo is the Virgin” (77). Later, Blanche cries out when Stella pours some coke into the glass and it foams over: “Right on my pretty white skirt!” (80). She is afraid that the potential stain would affect the appearance of her innocence.

The pressure regarding her sexual life evidently results in quite neurotic behaviour. Blanche refuses to accept her past and also living without men, but there is a conflict between her needs and the expectations, which are rooted deep in her mind. Considering the character of the traditional concept of sexuality, she cannot stand to be seen as a frivolous woman driven by sexual desire, “because the creaturely aspects of sex make apparent our animal nature, which reminds us of our vulnerability and morality” (Solomon 1999, 1173). It has been proved that “individuals high in neuroticism are anxious about many things, but that they are

particularly prone to anxiety and problems related to death and sexuality” (1176). That may lead her to fantasising about a gentleman who can save her in the romantic manner. “Romantic love transforms sex from an animal act to a symbolic human experience thereby making it a highly meaningful part of one's cultural worldview and obscuring its threatening link to mortality” (1176). In other words, “love is believed to legitimize sex” (1181) and people high in neuroticism need that justification. That could be one of the consequences of Blanche's frustration recognizable in her actions, that reflects the state of her ego.

### **1.2.3. Blanche's Shadow**

As I have already mentioned, Blanche's character represents the distinction between society, whose values create the super-ego, and natural human impulses. The conflict of those two forces is most apparent in her relationship to Stanley. Even before she encounters him, she is somewhat offended by the conditions of his and Stella's place. After she arrives, she is shocked and says: “This – can this be – her home?” (Williams 1951, 16). It is the first signal of her disapproving attitude towards Stanley's lifestyle, which is completely different from what she is used to. Later on, when she is talking to Stella, she expresses her repulsion very clearly: “Oh, I'm not going to be hypocritical, I'm going to be honestly critical about it! Never, never, never in my worst dreams could I picture – Only Poe! Only Mr. Edgar Allan Poe – could do it justice!” (19-20).

The reference to Poe, an author famous for his stories dealing with the issue of death, also foreshadows what Elysian Fields, Stanley and Stella's home, symbolizes to Blanche.

Stanley's character is somewhat disturbing for Blanche. When she and her sister talk about Stanley, and Blanche is concerned about whether he will like her, Stella

calms her down, but, the very next moment, she points out the distinction between his habits and customs of the southern society: “You'll get along fine together, if you'll just try not to – well – compare him with men that we went out with at home” (23-24). Although she tries to be friendly, the animal impulses which control his behaviour agitate her. The longer she stays there, the stronger the tension is between them and she feels a need to defend herself.

However, Blanche fights against Stanley in quite a provocative way. Since she constantly seeks men's attention, she flirts with him. There are many moments when sexual tension between the two of them is suggested. As an example may serve a scene where Blanche asks Stanley to help her with her dress and tries to make him express his opinion about her looks: “Some buttons in back! You may enter! How do I look?” (38). A little while later, she says: “Would you think it possible that I was once considered to be – attractive? (39). The way he reacts never satisfies her, though. His overbearing personality frustrates her more and more.

Nevertheless, the statement that “the Blanche-Stanley struggle is purely an external dramatization of what is going on in Blanche's head” (Bak 2004, 12) seems justified. Since Blanche herself strives to hide her basic instincts, Stanley is not the primary cause of her discomfort. She basically struggles with herself, while Stanley represents the unconscious part of her mind she is ashamed of. This phenomenon is called “projection”. Through this mental process, an individual attributes his or her repressed qualities to another person. It is a kind of unconscious defence mechanism which helps people deal with the dark side of their personalities.

This “dark side” corresponds to “*the shadow*”, one of the Jungian archetypes of the collective unconscious.

The collective unconscious is a part of the psyche which can be negatively distinguished from a personal unconscious by the fact that it

does not, like the latter, owe its existence to personal experience and consequently is not a personal acquisition. While the personal unconscious is made up essentially of contents which have at some time been conscious but which have disappeared from consciousness through having been forgotten or repressed, the contents of the collective unconscious have never been in consciousness, and therefore have never been individually acquired, but owe their existence exclusively to heredity. (Jung 1981, 42)

The acknowledgement of the shadow requires awareness of “the dark aspects of the personality” (Jung 1959, 8). Therefore, “the shadow is a moral problem that challenges the whole ego-personality, for no one can become conscious of the shadow without considerable moral effort” (8).

Consequently, Blanche's unstable ego struggles to deal with all the issues mentioned above not only within her own mind, but also externally, during encounters with other people. Stanley represents the repressed contents of her mind regarding her personal traumatic experience as well as the shadow itself. First of all, he repeatedly explicitly forces her to accept reality. The cruellest confrontation comes right before the climax, when Stanley is upset with Blanche's illusions and says: “There isn't no millionaire! And Mitch didn't come back with roses 'cause I know where he is” (Williams 1951, 127). Then, his rage escalates: “And look at yourself! Take a look at yourself in that wornout Mardi Gras outfit, rented for fifty cents from some ragpicker! And with the crazy crown on! What queen do you think you are?” (127).

In addition, the animal passion and maybe even the aggressivity in Stanley's personality could unconsciously remind her of her cruelty leading to her husband's breakdown, and this repels her. The conventions of the society she comes from

would not accept such manners.

However, she is also attracted to him at the same time. Although she tries to fight the sexual desire, she is hardly successful. This ambiguity on both sides creates a variety of negative emotions which are intensified during the time Blanche stays at Stanley and Stella's apartment.

Stanley is naturally extremely irritated by Blanche's persona which is the exact opposite of the shadow. At the beginning of their relationship, during a conversation about what a woman would have to do to interest Stanley, he completes Blanche's sentence as follows: "Lay...her cards on the table" (40). Blanche, however, keeps her act instead of "laying cards on the table". That, of course, does not prevent him from being sexually attracted to her, especially since she has tempted him for such a long time.

Here comes the fatal moment when the "time when there was no external influence" (Dant 2003, 90) and the death drive takes its toll, gets closer. The physical rape of Blanche is followed by her final mental breakdown. Now it is her ego collapsing. Despite the brutal nature of the incident, it was in fact her own actions that what made Stanley say: "We've had this date with each other from the beginning!" (Williams 1951, 130). Blanche was perfectly right when she talked to Mitch about Stanley and said: "The first time I laid eyes on him I thought to myself, that man is my executioner! That man will destroy me, unless –" (93). "The man", however, is just a personification of the real cause of the destruction, which was not a matter of one moment but was happening for a long period of time. Desire brought her to her final destination.

## **2. Censorship**

In the previous chapter, I suggested that the plot of *A Streetcar Named Desire* is based on the struggle between the two kinds of contents of the human mind - instincts and the super-ego. However, not only does the conflict appear in the story as a basic aspect of the play, it also became a real issue while bringing it to the screen. The rules of internal censorship causing the inner fight that resulted in Allan Grey's suicide and Blanche's breakdown were actually applied in writing the script for the screen under the threat of the rules of the Production Code. As ironic as it may seem, conventional society, whose influence on the individual's life is criticized in Blanche DuBois' story, was powerful enough to interfere with the script so that the controversial, though essential, topics were toned down in the film adaptation. In this chapter, I present the effects of the enforcement of the Production Code on the characters in the film adaptation of *A Streetcar Named Desire* as an analogy to the consequences of the super-ego operating in the human mind.

### **2.1. The Production Code**

During the time when the film adaptation of *Streetcar* was to be made, certain strict rules had to be obeyed in Hollywood. Similarly to the super-ego representing the norms of society in the human mind, the Catholic Legion of Decency and the Production Code Administration represented the conventions of society during the first half of the twentieth century in the motion picture industry of the USA. As a result, “a new code of self-censorship had been adopted in the early 1930s” (Bordwell and Thompson 1986, 331). The Production Code, also called “The Hays Code”, after William Harrison Hays, the head of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors Association (MPPDA) (Cristian and Dragon 2008, 73), served to bring some ethical principles to the film industry which would “rescue it from the harmful



influence of the immoral context in which movies were produced” (73) after the Great Depression. According to the general principles of the Production Code, a film cannot “lower the moral standards” of the spectators, who should not sympathize with “the side of crime, wrongdoing, evil or sin”. Further, “correct standards of life, subject only to the requirements of drama and entertainment, shall be presented” and, finally, “law, natural or human,” should not be ridiculed, nor should the audience sympathize with any violation of it (Motion Pictures Producers and Distributors Association 1930). In the section of “Particular Applications”, specific restrictions regarding crime, brutality, sex, vulgarity, obscenity, profanity and other such aspects are described.

However, the Second World War brought demand for “more adult forms of popular topics” (Cristian and Dragon 2008, 74) and the concept of film being reduced only to a practical tool of manipulation began to be replaced by a different approach treating it as an authentic form of art. This cultural liberalization in the USA led to a weakening of the power of the Production Code Administration, which is why the film adaptation of *Streetcar* could be made at all. On the other hand, the influence of the PCA and the Catholic Legion of Decency was still strong enough to control film production to a certain extent. Censorship in some form lasted until 1968.

*A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951) was the first film of this „more adult“ kind made in Hollywood (75). The controversial issues that Blanche's ego is striving to deal with during the play appeared to be a problem also for the film's production. It was a challenge under the conditions to bring them to the screen and let the viewers deal with the subject themselves. Many of the essential aspects of the play corresponded with the list of topics disapproved by the PCA. Since their authority was supported by members of the Legion of Decency, who suggested to rate the film

as “C” (Condemned) (75), it was necessary to make several alterations so that the film could receive a good rating and yet gain the interest of the audience, including Catholics. The Breen Office, named after Joseph Breen, the head of the PCA until 1954, objected that the homosexuality of Blanche's husband should not be mentioned in the film, “unsanctioned promiscuity” (Cahir 1994, 74) was unacceptable as well as “obscene” language including not only vulgar expressions, “but also any references to natural bodily functions such as urination or sex” (Dowling 1981, 235), and, last but not least, the final rape scene was to be completely omitted.

Elia Kazan, the director of both, the stage play and the film, and Tennessee Williams knew that these changes would be fatal for the original plot, since the censors would this way remove the most crucial points of it. The goal of a faithful film adaptation of *Streetcar*, which Kazan originally intended to make (234), was impossible to reach. However, they managed not to let the demands of the Breen Office “empty Williams' work of its essential theme” (Cahir 1994, 76). “The success of the film, oddly, is due in part to the way in which Kazan and Williams turned the tables and made potentially destructive constraints work constructively in the movie” (72), for “Elia Kazan understood the literal-mindedness of his censors and used it to his advantage” (76).

However, even though the influence of the censorship did not reduce this complex work to a simple melodrama (74), it had some serious consequences observable not only in the characters' actions, but also in the spectators' perception of them, for the members of audience are those whose minds the censors intended to control. The struggle between the conventions of society and human instincts affected the state of the ego in *A Streetcar Named Desire* again, only this time it was not a part of the story, nor did it belong among unconscious mental processes. It was a real intervention and it came from outside.

## **2.2. Gender Roles and Views on Sexuality**

Many conventions are strengthened by the attitude of people who uncompromisingly attribute certain characteristic features to each of the sexes and refuse to tolerate any deviations from what, based on their prejudices, is considered normal. Tradition dictates specific appropriate behaviour, depending on whether one is a woman or a man. A common member of society faces this phenomenon every day while seeing a contentedly looking couple, whose little daughter is willingly wearing a pink dress and clutching a doll in her hands, a proud father, whose son is manly enough to beat his rival up, or observing how people react when there are two men kissing each other on the street. For some people, the physical distinction between male and female determines what is supposed to be feminine or masculine (Klages 2006, 91-92). Since the Production Code was built on such stereotypes, considering the story of Blanche DuBois' character, this became an issue substantially affecting the plot of *Streetcar*.

### **2.2.1. The Deletion of Homosexuality**

The most controversial subject in this respect was homosexuality. Although no homosexual character explicitly appears in the play, it was Blanche's husband's homosexuality, that led him to committing suicide. “That same suicide is the cause of her own psychological destruction, the heart of the conflict between Stella; Stella's husband, Stanley; and her sister and Stanley's sister-in-law, Blanche” (Dorwick 2003, 81). It is the origin of her personal struggle creating the core motif of the play. Therefore, Allan Grey's homosexuality is an essential aspect of *Streetcar* and its omission had a serious impact on the whole plot. Nevertheless, the Production Code stated clearly that “sex perversion or any inference to it is forbidden” (Motion Pictures Producers and Distributors Association 1930), where “sex perversion”, in this case, refers to sexual attraction between people of the same sex.

This elision changed the image of the personality of Alan Grey, whom, though he is dead, we repeatedly hear of from Blanche. In the original play, his suicide was a result of his struggle with the general illiberal attitude towards unconventional lifestyle and especially Blanche's incomprehension of his needs. He was unhappy because he was forced to deny his real nature all the time. He was in the right. It was the cruelty of society that led him to the desperate deed, since his ego was too fragile and could not manage the pressure. From what Blanche says to Mitch after they spent an evening together, the fact that he was a homosexual is practically obvious: “Then I found out. In the worst of all possible ways. By coming suddenly into a room that I thought was empty which wasn't empty, but had two people in it... the boy I had married and an older man who had been his friend for years...” (Williams 1951, 95). After Blanche explained that Alan had committed suicide at the edge of the lake in front of Moon Lake Casino later that night, she also suggests very clearly that there was injustice in how she reacted to the revelation: “It was because – on the dance-floor – unable to stop myself – I'd suddenly said – 'I saw! I know! You disgust me...’” (96). In the film, on the other hand, it seems like there was no serious reason for Alan's death, or at least it is not quite clear what it was. All that Blanche says to clarify for Mitch what the problem was is: “At night I pretended to sleep, and I heard him crying. Crying. Crying the way a lost child cries.”. Further, when she speaks of the night in Moon Lake Casino, the line goes as follows: “It was because – on the dance-floor – unable to stop myself, I'd said: “You're weak. I've lost respect for you. I despise you” (Kazan 1951). The sexual otherness is merely suggested. Based on Blanche's words, one could assume what was going on. Yet, in this case, Alan's situation is even more frustrating because it seems that neither Blanche, nor he was consciously aware of his homosexuality. He, under the control of the super-ego, denied and repressed his instinctual needs. Furthermore, if a spectator does not come

to the conclusion that takes Allan Grey for a homosexual, the only characterization of his is “a nervousness, a tenderness, an uncertainty”.

In addition, this issue had a particularly serious impact on Blanche's character. Even without external censorship, her ego tries to repress the inconvenient memory of the incident with her husband throughout the play. This inability to face the reality of her past is what the story is about, and homosexuality is a cornerstone of that reality. In the film, however, the censors erased even what remained of the memory of Alan's sexual orientation in Blanche's mind, thus her character seems to be just a neurotic, confused woman who lost her emotionally unstable, unhappy husband, who was too weak to survive his life. “Blanche's cruelty was deleted along with the deletion of the homosexuality theme” (Cahir 1994, 76). Since censorship thus also toned down the insensitivity of her behaviour on the dance floor, the guilt Blanche tries to deal with simply does not seem valid enough, which makes her more of a victim than how she is depicted in the original play. She certainly does express her feeling of responsibility for Alan's death in the film, especially when she says: “I killed him”. However, nobody can take that statement in the context of the film seriously.

The censorship of homosexuality in *Streetcar* is basically the repression of repression. During the film, the spectator is also confused and perceives that there is something very important unspoken. Consequently, Blanche's character seems to be even more unstable, more frustrated and neurotic than that of the original Blanche, and also even more of an enigma.

### **2.2.2. Masculinity and Femininity**

At the same time, not only homosexuality would have spoilt the image of traditional gender roles guaranteeing a proper moral example in the eyes of members of the PCA and the Legion of Decency. There were many issues to be discussed,

especially concerning Blanche's and Stanley's characters, whose depiction did not correspond with standards of the PCA. Certain aspects of their behaviour were not accepted and had to be “repressed”, although they were natural and, therefore, realistic. The executed modifications of Blanche's and Stanley's personalities also necessarily attributed to a dualistic, exaggerated “black and white” view of their story.

According to Carl Gustav Jung, there are archetypes of the collective unconscious which represent the qualities of the opposite sex operating in the human mind. These archetypes are called *anima* and *animus*. “Just as the man is compensated by a feminine element, so woman is compensated by a masculine one” (Jung 1959, 14). Further, “the animus corresponds to the paternal Logos just as the anima corresponds to the maternal Eros” (14). In other words, there is a masculine element in every woman and a feminine one in every man.

Jung's theory of anima and animus can serve to verify Blanche's and Stanley's ambiguity in the original stage play. The theoretical concept of a purely masculine or feminine figure is nonsense in principle. Jung's perspective on the encounter of the two archetypes could also resemble certain features of Blanche and Stanley's relationship: “When animus and anima meet, the animus draws his sword of power and the anima ejects her poison of illusion and seduction. The outcome need not always be negative, since the two are equally likely to fall in love” (15). However, “in both its positive and negative aspects the anima/animus relationship is always full of “animosity” (16). In Stanley's case, the idea of love at first sight seems to be ridiculous. The aggression, nevertheless, could be explained by Jung's controversial remark on men's perception of behaviour of a woman in power according to which “no matter how friendly and obliging a woman's Eros may be, no logic on earth can shake her if she is ridden by the animus. Often the man has the feeling – and he is not

altogether wrong – that only seduction or a beating or rape would have necessary power or persuasion” (15). And, in fact, Blanche's passion was indeed subdued by Stanley's manly figure, just as Jung argues. His sexism confirms not only men's fear of women's animus, but also the very existence of the animus.

The supporters of the Production Code were afraid of woman's masculinity as well as of man's femininity and considered it unacceptable. As a result of this irrational anxiety, the personalities of Blanche and Stanley had to be modified.

Regarding Blanche's character, the Breen Office demanded primarily the alteration of the issue of guilt and promiscuity. In fact, many problematic aspects of her personality were solved by the omission of Alan Grey's homosexuality. The censors stuck to the conventional concept of femininity, which is of course inconsistent with the idea of a woman who is driven by desire, intentionally provokes men and by that basically initiates sexual intercourse. A woman is supposed to be passive, innocent and preferably unaware of the power of sexual desire so that she cannot use it to her benefit and remains controlled by man, for “instead of taking on qualities of aggression and control she acquires the art of love and conciliation” (Mitchell 1974, 405).

The reason of Blanche's personal struggle became somewhat unclear and the “double repression” of her “dissolute history” (Cahir 1994, 74) made her “a purified, rarified creature, lovely and fragile” (75). As a result, Blanche in the film adaptation of *Streetcar* is “more of a heroine than Williams had originally intended” (Dowling 1981, 235). She appears to be a victim of Stanley's masculine aggression, who is too fragile and weak to fight back. Consequently, the rape seems to be a result of “the brute force and sinful cruelty of Stanley” (Cahir 1994, 75), since Blanche is depicted as a character “far more sinned against than sinning [...] Blanche's moral and spiritual integrity is never called into question” (75). To preserve the impression, the

part when Stanley refers to her provocative behaviour right before the intercourse by saying: “We've had this date with each other from the beginning!” (Williams 1951, 130) had to be omitted. The rape then became an incident Blanche is not at all responsible for.

The traditional view of femininity made Blanche a weak, dependent, confused creature who does not even seem to understand the adult world properly and, therefore, does not perceive what is going on between her and Stanley. This insistence on her innocence resulted in a highly unrealistic characterization. As a consequence of censorship, Blanche's personality lost the characteristics of an adult woman and gained rather those of a child.

Stanley Kowalski is without doubt the example of a manly figure. Nevertheless, in spite of this, he did not satisfy the censors' idea of pure masculinity and the reason for that were certain feminine aspects of his character.

The most disturbing issue in this respect appeared to be homosociality. Although Stanley is “overtly heterosexual” (Dorwick 2003, 80), there is homoerotic tension between him and his friends, the poker players. This natural “ambiguity that, in Sedgwick's formulation, always exists between men, and which is best seen in that quiet moment in which Stanley rests his head wearily on Steve's shoulder” (88), is eliminated in the film adaptation of *Streetcar* “with the exception of the highly homoerotic shower scene” (80-81), which takes place right after the poker game with Stanley's companions, after he got drunk and lost his temper.

However, since the screen version “increases the visibility of that homosociality and makes it even more apparent to movie-goers” (88), even there some alterations were made. While Stanley's friends are holding him drunk under the shower, he is passive. He does not initiate any physical contact. “The stage version has him awake, but quiet, till the moment he becomes enraged again; the movie



version has him clearly passed out” (89).

Further, the coloured clothes worn by men in *Streetcar* was considered as feminine. “In spite of Williams' attempt to match the idea of brightly colored male clothing with the highly colored plumage of birds and the animal kingdom (and therefore with masculinity)” (87), the traditional attitude towards the way men and women are usually dressed was different. Although the clothing in the film adaptation remained mostly the same, “the most homosocial moment of all” (88) was an exception. To soften the homoerotic tension, the coloured shirts were not visible during the poker game till the moment when Stella wants the men to go away (88). Nevertheless, since the film is black and white, this aspect was not a serious issue.

### **2.3. Sex and Violence**

The topic of sex was a serious issue while bringing *Streetcar* to the screen. Similarly to Blanche's super-ego forcing her to repress her “dissolute history” (Cahir 1994, 74), the Breen Office had many objections against any reference to sex, and demanded the censorship of such scenes so that the film would not “lower the moral standards” (Motion Pictures Producers and Distributors Association 1930) of the spectators. Consequently, the plot itself was quite seriously affected.

Any sign of sexual desire was problematic. Firstly, no direct mention of sex was allowed. While “in the play, Blanche spends more time talking about Stella's sexual relationship with Stanley than either of them does” (Dowling 1981, 236), “in the film, no one talks about it” (236). “Noisy, pleasurable lovemaking” (Cahir 1994, 74) was to be censored as well as the final rape scene. However, the crucial event eventually was permitted to be at least suggested, since, according to the Production Code, suggestion of seduction or rape is only possible “when essential for the plot” (Motion Pictures Producers and Distributors Association 1930). Without this compromise, the film would be meaningless (Dowling 1981, 236). Yet, the way

the scene stayed in the film version is somewhat confusing for a spectator.

The question is, how the repression of such a natural part of human life as sexuality can help people keep their moral standards. In fact, doing so seems more likely to lead only to frustration. In the chapter dealing with the problem of Blanche's sexuality, I have already referred to research proving that "individuals high in neuroticism are anxious about many things, but that they are particularly prone to anxiety and problems related to death and sexuality" (Solomon 1999, 1176). This is quite an interesting point, considering the conventional view of sex. The section of the Production Code, where this issue is discussed, is introduced as follows: "The sanctity of the institution of marriage and the home shall be upheld. Pictures shall not infer that low forms of sex relationship are the accepted or common thing" (Motion Pictures Producers and Distributors Association 1930). However, according to Wilhelm Reich, "monogamy destroys sexual happiness" (Mitchell 1974, 205) if the sexual attraction disappears. Therefore, natural human impulses should not be ignored. Blanche's character in the original version of *Streetcar* is a good example of this fact. However, her promiscuity is also pathological, since it is one of the consequences of her collapsing ego.

Violence is one of the main motifs in *Streetcar*. Although there are a lot of restrictions applied to the problem of crime and aggressivity in the Production Code, it remained in the plot and it was even intensified by making Stanley's character almost the very embodiment of evil. Yet, considering the struggle between basic instincts and norms of society and the fear of sexuality, it is no surprise that Stanley, being a masculine figure belonging to a lower social class than Blanche, driven by animal impulses, was after the intervention of the Breen Office presented "in a much more negative light" (Dowling 1981, 237). Since Blanche's character was purified and her guilt was more or less erased, "Stanley was made to appear much more

brutal, unattractive and villainous” (237). Just like the effort to create a purely feminine, innocent Blanche and a purely masculine Stanley, even this separation of good and evil resembling rather fairy-tale patterns disrupts the possibility of a realistic characterization.

Stanley's brutality escalates when he rapes Blanche. This scene, however, was allowed to be suggested in the film adaptation only under the condition that the aggressor would be punished by Stella leaving him in the end of the film (237). Stella indeed walks away from the apartment saying: “No, I'm not. I'm not going back in there, not this time. Never going back, never” (Kazan 1951). Nevertheless, she goes upstairs, to her neighbour's, which indicates that it is not certain, if Stella really means it this time (237). That partially saved the conclusion, which would be otherwise also far from the reality of life.

## Conclusion

*A Streetcar Named Desire* is a deep psychological drama reflecting the damaging consequences of the conflict between society and the individual. The inner struggle of Blanche DuBois' super-ego against basic instincts resulting in a complete destruction of her ego perfectly illustrates the complexity of the human mind which cannot be treated as a machine behaving in accordance to some ridiculously simplified stereotypes. A human life is depicted with everything that belongs to it – pleasure, misery, animality, humanity, love, cruelty. After all, Blanche's story shows the danger of the denial of the real nature of human life. Only by openly discussing issues like Alan Grey's homosexuality, Blanche's promiscuity or Stanley's aggression, one can understand what is going on in Blanche's life.

Since the plot is primarily based on Blanche's trauma and her mental processes since then, the play also emphasizes the significant role of the unconscious part of the psyche. That again signifies the complex nature of character and does not reduce it to what one sees.

This problem of the distinction between actual natural human needs and the conventions of society is demonstrated even by the film adaptation of *Streetcar*. However, it is happening indirectly and from a different point of view. The censors considered the very same issues that are the crucial points of the plot of *Streetcar* necessary to repress, just like Blanche, controlled by the super-ego, did. This avoidance of the reality of life resulting in frustration and neuroticism toned down the original message and made the characters of *Streetcar* unrealistic in several ways and all of them rather frustrate the spectator than help him/her keep his/her moral standards, as the Production Code stated.

Firstly, the Breen Office ignored the way the human mind actually works and modified Blanche's and Stanley's characters so that both became either purely

masculine or feminine and guilty or innocent. Such characterization not only does not satisfy expectations of a viewer who lives a real life, but it also does not explain the events and meaning of the work sufficiently. It is obvious that there is something else going on behind the curtain and the audience is frustrated by not knowing what it is.

In addition, the omission of such basic aspects of human adult life, as sex is, offends the audience. By such modifications of reality, the censors make the spectator feel practically like either a very little child, or confused and lost. That, of course, is the opposite of the original, realistic depiction of Blanche's struggle.

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